

Old Beesley House
Beesley Point, Cape May County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
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135 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Old Beesley House
Beesley Point, Cape May County, New Jersey

Owner: Island Mortgage Company

Date of Erection: Shortly after 1803

Architect:

Builder: Thomas Beesley

Present Condition: Very good

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - brick

Exterior walls - frame
construction

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch with dormers
on higher unit

Historical Data:

We believe from the architectural evidence that this house was erected shortly after Thomas Beesley purchased the land in 1803. A search of the earlier records shows mention of buildings - the deed of 1743 from Joseph Golden to Captain Nicholas Stillwell for two tracts of 50 acres specifically mentions houses and buildings. However, the sum involved was only 95 pounds. Captain Stillwell left the land to his son Nicholas who added 107 acres to the original tract. The whole tract of 157 acres he sold to Thomas Borden in 1792, who in turn sold to Beesley in 1803 for \$2667. (C213-Cape May Deeds). Since the main part of the house is large and

since the addition on the elevation is later than the main section, we do not believe the purchase price included the present house. We know from an examination of the later acquisitions of Thomas Beesley that the house was built by 1809, for in that year Thomas Beesley purchased a piece of meadow in which the description states "Thomas Beesley's House chimney bears N. 66 W." In his will (A-286 Cape May Wills) Thomas Beesley left his property to his wife Rhoda; when the division of her estate was made in 1862 Ellen B. Williams received the large part of the house. (Divisions B-540 Cape May). In 1865 she and Japhet I. Williams transferred to Richard B. Williams (32-307 Cape May Deeds). By 1879 the property was out of the family for in that year Gilbert Leonard sold to William Ives (45-104 Cape May Deeds); although there is no record of how Gilbert Leonard received title the property is described as the "homestead of late Thomas Beesley". Four transfers are recorded from that time to 1934 when the present owner received title.

The proportions of this house - 20 feet depth and 40 feet front with a wall height of 19 feet to soffit of cornice, and a lengthwise ridge to the gable slope at some 45 degrees give a dignity of mass that is greatly in contrast to the earlier farmhouse of this seashore region. The first floor has the wide central stairhall from front to rear with a large room on each side, this is a local arrangement inherited from the Georgian mansion house design in which four rooms were the standard. The second and attic floor plans are like that of the first.

The great chimney breast with its handsome mantelpiece centered on the gable end wall of each of the two rooms on the first floor is elegant. The composition of the molded wood shelf broken around the central panel and each of the reeded pilasters which with a molded wood surround frame the marble-faced fireplace are in the manner of the post-Revolutionary period, although the whole with its

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fluted oval sunburst ornaments reminds one of the Georgian. The fleurs-de-lis studded cast iron back and jambs of all the fireplaces are definitely early nineteenth century.

There is also a fine staircase with an open well from the first to the attic floor. It has turned baluster newell posts, scroll finished open string, and plain handrail matched by a half rail and pilasters against the opposite wall. Chair rails and a five inch baseboard capped with a cyma molding complete the finishing woodwork of the rooms on the first and second floors. The doors are of six panels with a slight rise, all their rails and stiles pegged together.

The exterior includes a very graceful main entrance composed of a semi-circular glazed fanlight transom over a four panel door; the whole is enclosed by a reeded pilaster on either side under a cornice which breaks around them. The two sash windows of the first floor rooms show nine lights in the upper and six in the lower, an arrangement common in earlier work. The large panes are 10 x 12 inches and set in slender muntins an indication of late eighteenth or early nineteenth century date.

The minor addition to the south gable end, erected flush with its facade, is apparently a replacement of the original kitchen wing. The house is unaltered and except for the steps of the front entrance which are missing, it retains its old charm.

Bibliography:

A search of records at Cape May Court House by Oscar F. Benjamin and of the Secretary of State's Office by Lewis D. Cook who is the author of the architectural comments

Lewis D. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Wilkine